

Saved by the Smoke Alarm White Earth Sleep Safe Program

American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) children are at high risk of death due to house fires. Home fires are the third leading cause of death for AI/AN children ages 1-4. Smoke alarms nearly double the chances of surviving a house fire, yet many reservation homes do not have adequate numbers of working smoke alarms. The Sleep Safe Program was created as a partnership between the Indian Health Service, US Fire Administration and Head Start to provide education and to install photoelectric smoke alarms in the homes of Head Start students.

Smoke Alarms Alert Family to House Fire. The White Earth Head Start serves children in five communities in Minnesota. They have participated in the Sleep Safe Program for six years and have installed over 1,000 smoke alarms in tribal homes with Head Start children. Robert Thelen, the Home Base Teacher for the Elbow Lake Head Start sent in the following story about Sleep Safe smoke alarms alerting his family to a house fire.

On a Sunday afternoon in April there was a fire at the Thelen residence. No one was hurt, but there was some property damage. The fire started in the parent's bedroom when the wind blew the curtain, which caught the lamp and knocked it onto the bed. When the lamp hit the bed it pushed the button on and the bulb started the mattress and bedding on fire. The fire then reached the curtain and the smoke alarm went off. Mom went upstairs, grabbed the fire extinguisher and put the fire out. While this was happening, Paige Thelen, a student in the Elbow Lake Head Start program heard the smoke alarm and yelled "Fire!" She told her siblings to go with her to their safe place, the mailbox on the other side of the road. They waited there until Mom told them it was okay to come back in. The mattress did try to start on fire again, but Mom managed to put the fire out and haul the mattress outside.



Burned Mattress

Once again the Sleep Safe Program has proved that it is an effective program and can save lives!

Robert L. Thelen, Sr., Home Base Teacher, Elbow Lake Head Start

For more information about the Sleep Safe Program visit <http://www.ihs.gov/MedicalPrograms/InjuryPrevention/index.cfm>